

## COMMENTATIONES AD RECENTIOREM LATINITATEM SPECTANTES

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### *QUEMLIBET DEHORTARI NE ... SENECTUTIS VICIA DESIDERET.* MAXIMIANUS'S ELEGY ON OLD AGE AND A FEW EXAMPLES OF ITS MEDIEVAL RECEPTION

ABSTRACT. Wasył Anna Maria, *Quemlibet dehortari ne ... senectutis vicia desideret*. Maximianus's Elegy on Old Age and a Few Examples of Its Medieval Reception.

The present paper is devoted to Maximianus, and in particular to the motif of *mala senectutis* as developed by this late antique (6<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) Latin elegiac poet. After discussing some particularly informative passages, I focus on Maximianus's interpretations and reinterpretations by Columbanus (543–615), Eugenius of Toledo († 657), and the anonymous author of the ninth century *Imitatio Maximiani*. I also point out his presence in vernacular medieval literature, namely English. Last but not least, I demonstrate how Maximianus's image of an old man praying to Mother Earth inspired one of medieval scribes copying his text (in ms BJ 2141).

Keywords: Maximianus; old age in Latin literature; Eugenius of Toledo; Columbanus of Bobbio; *Imitatio Maximiani*; Maximianus's echoes in Middle English literature (*Le Regret de Maximian*; Geoffrey Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*); ms BJ 1954 & BJ 2141, Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellońska; Andrzej Grzymała.

Andrzej Grzymała of Poznań, (d. around 1466), an outstanding professor of the Kraków Academy (only in 1817 renamed as Jagiellonian University), teaching, among others, in the department of liberal arts, was so generous to donate to the University Library a few of the codices he possessed. Among them, one can find a manuscript, now catalogued as BJ 1954, signed, on the inside part of the desk cover, by the owner himself: *pro libraria artistarum*.

The codex, in its final shape, is of course a so-called 'block', a combination of several various contents, once circulating separately and belonging to different persons.<sup>1</sup> Yet what attracts particular attention is a unit found in the initial

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, the owner of the oldest part, dated to 1380, (cc. 213–240; pp. 421–476) was Bartłomiej of Jasło, whose handwriting can be probably found on c. 238 / p. 471. I follow the

part (columns 1–108; pages 1–214), composed of the works by two Roman satirists, Juvenal and Persius, and, subsequently, three texts written quite elegantly by the same hand and, apparently, juxtaposed not simply by chance, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, Eberhard the German's *Laborintus*, and – last but not least – *Maximiani ethica de fragilitate humane vite*. In addition, Eberhard's verse treatise is accompanied by an extensive commentary, whereas both in the *Poetria nova* and in Maximianus there is no commentary, but room left for one. Besides, at the end of the *Laborintus* one can see a brief note which appears to be in Grzymała's handwriting.<sup>2</sup> It should not be an exaggeration to conclude that the whole unit *Poetria nova*–*Laborintus*–*Maximiani ethica* could be planned, and maybe even used, as reading material among Professor Grzymała's students of the *Artes* in the Kraków Academy in mid-fifteenth century. Especially, if we also take into consideration that Maximianus's piece, which is of particular interest for us now, however not commented, is given several *maniculae* (by various hands, at least three, in my view) and separation marks (in red ink, above the main text).

A modern classicist may find it somewhat surprising. Maximianus is a poet known (maybe even renowned) among specialists in Latin late antiquity, but he is rarely a subject of more regular lectures or seminars. Too rarely, for sure, as he is a truly intriguing author, probably a contemporary of Cassiodorus and Boethius (whom, actually, he does not only quote but even introduces into his poetic world as one of its protagonists), and a legal heir, though some would say a 'latecomer', rather, to the tradition of the Roman elegy. His major work is usually cited as *Elegiae*, even though there is considerable evidence to see it as a *carmen continuum*, a narrative whole (yet not necessarily a coherent one). Certainly, it does re-exploit themes of the Roman love elegy, but from a very particular perspective. The speaking ego is an old man who mainly concentrates on his present, very bitter experience of suffering and impotence (also/above all, the sexual one as Maximianus's piece is most of all a fascinating statement on asceticism and corporeality), the experience of being excluded, humiliated, and despised.

Hence, it is not incidental, and it seems quite fair in fact, that in several medieval manuscripts Maximianus's work is defined – similarly to the label we find in BJ 1954 (*Cr*), namely *de fragilitate vite* – as: *de sene, in senectutem, de senectute, de commodiis iuventutis et de incommodiis senectutis*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed,

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unpublished description of the manuscript made by Maria Kowalczyk (cited as Kowalczyk). The material was provided to me by Dr. Ryszard Tatarzyński to whom I am particularly grateful for this kind help.

<sup>2</sup>"Magister Everardus Coloniensis post multos labores scolasticos reddidit se ordine monachorum Cisterciensi; priusquam se redderet, composuit istum libellum, in quo determinat, quem modum in regendo magister erga suos scolares habere debeat, quid docere debeat..."

<sup>3</sup>Such labels can be often found either in *tituli* or in *subscriptiones*. Occasionally, the text is accompanied by a commentary, stating, like in the one in *R*, "Materia huius auctoris sunt mala vite

our poet's description of the afflictions of old age makes the impression of being very realistic, and utterly pessimistic. The poem opens with an apostrophe to the 'jealous old age', whom the protagonist begs to release his life from the prison of the body.<sup>4</sup> The attention of a sensitive reader must be probably captured by the phrase *non sum qui fueram*, a clear allusion also to Propertius (I 12, 11), but especially to Ovid (*Tr.* III 11, 25), in particular Ovid the exilic poet, who for the most part inspired the poetics of Maximianus's mournful elegy (*flebilis elegia*).

The old age for our poet is first of all – typically enough – an antonym of the youth; the youth embodying, in his view, not only physical strength and skills, beauty and attractiveness to the opposite sex, but also – and this seems quite interesting – intellectual and moral qualities. A young man, or at least Maximianus as a young man, is by nature joyful and talkative (see ll. 105–108), which probably only helps his oratorical and poetic talents, yet he is also a personification of endurance, continence, and being pleased with little (see esp. ll. 9–12; 17; 21–28; 53–54). The old age, on its part, as a 'living death' and a 'grave for one's senses' (see e.g. ll. 15–16; 117–124), is silent and sad (see again ll. 105–108) and, if anything else at all, it is but a sum of physical limitations, indeed tribulations.

The aging process affects all senses: hearing, vision, taste, touch, as well as, generally, sensitivity to every kind of stimulation. What changes is of course the looks: body (shrinks), complexion (turns pale), skin (shrivels dry), muscles (stiffen). The face turns ugly, especially with watery eyes and shaggy eyebrows. Needless to say, among various symptoms, one can detect amnesia, but also some other, more physiological, pathologies: indigestion, lack of appetite, being prone to colds, cough, insomnia (or nightmares), photophobia (see collectively ll. 117–124; 131–140; 159–162; 245–252).

A well-read literary audience will probably not ignore the fact that this, rather detailed, description has quite much in common with the satiric tradition, especially with certain passages from Juvenal (*Sat.* 10). Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that some details are associable with what we often have read in Roman elegy: fatigue (*languor*), paleness, sleeplessness, lack of appetite are

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senis...". Sometimes, the *subscriptio* is metrical. A few times a variant of the following *subscriptio* is repeated: "Talibus infecte deponis verba senecte / scriptus ab hermiacho maximiane lupo". Interesting is also the metrical *subscriptio* in *Vn*: "est liber expletus cui nomen Maximianus / commendans iuvenes ac reprobandos senes". Apparently, the *subscriptio* in the Cracovian manuscript 2141 (*Cv*, on which below): "est liber expletus cui nomen Maximianus", is an incomplete version of precisely the one in *Vn*. There are important similarities between *Cv* and *Vn*, yet it cannot be said that BJ 2141 is simply a copy of *Vn*.

<sup>4</sup>"Aemula quid cessas finem properare senectus? / cur et in hoc fesso corpore tarda venis? / solve precor miseram tali de carcere vitam: / mors est iam requies, vivere poena mihi. / non sum qui fueram: periiit pars maxima nostri; / hoc quoque quod superest languor et horror habent" (ll. 1–6).

all typical, so to speak: ‘canonized’ symptoms of love. What is interesting, those motifs and terms were re-exploited by Ovid, precisely in his exilic poetry, to depict his deplorable situation of *poeta-relegatus*, a Roman who was forced to spend his last years among the Scythians. So Maximianus, as I have mentioned above, takes particularly much from Ovid and, just like him, turns the semantics of love poetry back into the semantics of a ‘true’, ‘literal’ suffering and illness.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the old age as portrayed by our poet is not only somatic problems but, above all, poor spiritual and intellectual condition. I shall focus here only on two passages,<sup>6</sup> chosen for their particular intertextual dimension.

Maximianus describes the old man’s behavior following a motif from Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. But it is noticeable that, in his version, Horace’s statements are given a much more pessimistic interpretation:

Horace, <i>A.P.</i> 169–174:	Maximianus, 195–200:
multa senem circumveniunt incommoda, vel quod quaerit et inventis miser abstinet, ac timet uti, vel quod res omnis timide gelideque ministrat, dilatator, †spe longus†, iners <p>avidusque futuri, difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti se puero, castigator censorque minorum.	stat dubius tremulusque senex semperque malorum credulus, et stultus quae facit ipse timet. laudat praeteritos, praesentes despicit annos, hoc tantum rectum, quod sapit ipse, putat. se solum doctum, se iudicat esse peritum, et quod sit sapiens, desipit inde magis.

If Horace’s *senex* manages all his affairs *timide gelideque*, delaying (*dilatator*, l. 172), Maximianus’s is doubtful and trembling, maybe also of fear (*dubius tremulusque*, l. 195), dreading foolishly his every act (*stultus quae facit ipse timet*, l. 196). If Horace’s *senex* is afraid of the future (<p>*avidusque*<sup>7</sup> *futuri*, l. 172), Maximianus’s is expectant of ill (*semperque malorum* / *credulus*, ll. 195–196). Finally, if Horace’s *senex* glorifies the times when he was young (*laudator temporis acti* / *se puero*, ll. 173–174), Maximianus’s not only praises the past but also despises the present years (*laudat praeteritos, praesentes despicit annos*, l. 197). Horace’s *senex* is *censor minorum* (*castigator censorque minorum*, l. 174), probably too harsh a critic to be taken seriously, Maximianus’s though lays himself open to ridicule believing to be the only wise and learned. This joke, as a matter of fact, is not merely malicious but, above all, very bitter, especially if we take into account that for Maximianus it is the reason that

<sup>5</sup> Compare especially Ovid’s *ex Ponto* I 10; see my further comments in Wasyl 2011: 124–125.

<sup>6</sup> See my discussion on these passages in the wider context of Maximianus’s poetry in Wasyl 2011: 131–133.

<sup>7</sup> I follow Brink’s (Brink 1971: 239–240) edition and his commentary on the passage, therefore I read *pavidus futuri*, ‘afraid of the future’, not *avidus futuri*.

guarantees being human. Deprived of this faculty, the *senex* loses in truth his humanity:

iam pavor est vidisse senem, nec credere possis  
hunc hominem, humana qui ratione caret (143–144).

The other passage concerns avarice, a vice just too frequent among the old. In a very Horatian manner, the late antique poet asks himself:

quid mihi divitiae, quarum si dempseris usum,  
quamvis largus opum, semper egenus ero?  
immo etiam poena est partis incumbere rebus,  
quas cum possideas est violare nefas.  
non aliter sitiens vicinas Tantalus undas  
captat et apposis abstinere ora cibis.  
efficior custos rerum magis ipse mearum  
conservans aliis, quae periere mihi;  
sicut in auricomis dependens plurimus hortis  
pervigil observat non sua poma draco (181–190).

Yet for Horace, accumulating wealth was ‘simply’ pointless if one should not be allowed to use it. Such is the sense of the simile he gives in *Sat.* I 1, 62–72, a man who would say: *nil satis est* (l. 62), obsessed with the desire to have more and more, is ridiculous in his greed, comparable only to Tantalus, thirsty and hungry in the middle of foods and water which elude his grasp. Maximianus’s picture is less black and white. For him an old man, poor in his richness, must not dissipate what he possesses because he is supposed to keep it: he has become a guardian of his own wealth, even though he guards it not for himself but for others. Thus, he is not only similar to Tantalus or to the dragon in the garden of Hesperides, in fact, he must be like Tantalus: it is just as much a crime (*nefas*) to squander one’s wealth as it is a punishment (*poena*) to depend upon it, to care for it. Once again irony is intertwined with pathos. An old man is ridiculous because he cannot (even, he must not) avoid being so. Old age is pathetic by nature.

“What makes old age so sad is, not that our joys, but that our hopes then cease”.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it may be precisely this lack of hope which causes Maximianus’s pessimism. It is quite intriguing, indeed, that in his poetry the only mention of an afterlife (any afterlife, I mean, hence the indefinite article) is the one given in the last distich of the entire poem where the author, in a very Ovidian manner again, predicts his own immortality through his work (“hac me defunctum vivere parte puto”, ll. 686 / ‘el.’ 6, 12). Maximianus, in his materialistic view

<sup>8</sup> See PAUL 1862, vol.1: 199. In quoting this passage I was inspired by Rosario Leotta who cites it, in Italian, as a motto to his study on the *Imitatio Maximiani*, see Leotta 1985: 91.



of the universe,<sup>9</sup> undoubtedly strongly inspired by Lucretius, does not seem to recognize, as, all the more so, he does not seem to expect, any other form of post-mortal existence. Hence, the only prayer he gives is directed neither to God nor to any pagan divinity but to Mother Earth whom he begs to show mercy to her suffering child and take him back to restore dead limbs to their native soil:

suscipe me, genitrix, nati miserere laborum:  
 membra velis gremio fessa fovere tuo;  
 horrent me pueri, nequeo velut ante videri,  
 horrendos partus cur sinis esse tuos?  
 Nil mihi cum superis, explevi munera vitae,  
 redde, precor, patrio mortua membra solo.  
 Quid miseros variis prodest suspendere poenis?  
 Non est materni pectoris ista pati (227–234).

The picture of an old, hunched man who strikes the ground with his cane, as if he were indeed knocking on his grave's door, an old man who is helpless like a child on his mother's lap, this picture is probably one of the most moving in Latin literature on senility. Certainly, it will not pass unnoticed among Maximianus's future readers.

Some of our poet's phrases were used as early as by his contemporaries, Arator and Corippus.<sup>10</sup> Yet examples of a true reception of the 'core' of his work, i.e. the very image of the old age, can be found only in texts by authors active in subsequent centuries. The first one, chronologically, may be a verse letter *Ad Sethum*, in 77 hexameters, by Columbanus of Bobbio (543–615).<sup>11</sup> The text is of protreptic character, indeed, as it offers the addressee a good piece of advice in what perspective he should see and lead his life, what should be aimed at and what should be avoided. Columbanus's instructions are explicit enough as they are based on steadfast belief in God and the eternal life (a belief Maximianus seemed not to have, or at least not to show): "vive Deo fidens, Christi praecepta

<sup>9</sup>The Lucretian accent in Maximianus's poetry has often been emphasized, see especially the commentary by Agozzino 1970 and the introductory part of the study by Schneider 2003. Yet I find particularly worth quoting the recent, succinct but very apt, comment by A. M. Juster (in his not yet published commented edition of Maximianus and the *Appendix Maximiani*, cited as Juster): "Maximianus' elegies ... ultimately present a bleak view of the world. They do not accept the Christian God or the Roman gods. Unlike Horace, though, who shares Maximianus' materialistic view of the universe, the aging Maximianus finds no comfort in the metaphor of being a good guest walking away from a good party".

<sup>10</sup>See especially two recent studies by Mastandrea 2004 and 2005.

<sup>11</sup>There has been considerable debate in recent years on the authorship of this poem. Some scholars have argued that it might have been composed later, and by a Columbanus's imitator. Yet the 'moderate' position of Michael Herren seems very sound. He eventually considers (and maybe even accepts) the possibility that the piece was written by some other author by the name of (the bishop) Colman, who might be in fact Columbanus himself or his close imitator who lived no later than the eighth century, in Italy. See Herren 2001: 99–112.

sequendo, / dummodo vita manet” (ll. 5–6). Hence his further, not less definite precepts, like for instance: “dispice, quae pereunt, fugitivae gaudia vitae” (l. 8) or “quid meminisse iuvat transactae gaudia vitae” (l. 31). The latter may be particularly relevant for us here since it clearly paraphrases Maximianus’s line: “nec meminisse volet transactae dulcia vitae” (l. 299 / el. 2, 7). Columbanus in fact declares that the foundation of his wisdom is the reading of old masters and learned poets (“sint tibi divitiae... (...) omnia quae dociles scripserunt ante magistri, / vel quae doctiloqui cecinerunt carmina vates”, ll. 11 & 13–14) and, throughout his letter to Seth, one can easily find some quotations and allusions. Worth noting is especially the one to Horace, who is cited as an authority known well enough not to be named: “*semper avarus eget nummo, testante poeta*” (l. 37).<sup>12</sup>

The very description of the tribulations of old age is aimed at making the addressee realize how passing the pleasures of the body are. That is why Columbanus’s observations are minute and realistic, as were Maximianus’s. The old age means, above all, frequent illnesses, as well as other *incommoda fragilis carnis*: languid limbs, stiffness in one’s knees, poor blood circulation, insomnia, of course, or shallow sleep; the old age means leaning on a cane, groans, mental weariness:

in mentemque tibi veniat tremebunda senectus,  
quam gelidae tandem sequitur violentia mortis.  
ultima iam sapiens meditatur tempora vitae,  
torpentes senio vires morbosque frequentes  
incertumque diem leti certosque dolores;  
multa senem fragilis vexant incommoda carnis.  
nam matie turpi tabescunt languida membra;  
tunc genuum iunctura riget, venasque per omnes  
illius in toto frigescit corpore sanguis;  
sic baculo nitens artus sustentat inertes.  
quid tristis memorem gemitus, quid tedia mentis?  
somnia abest oculis, illum sonus excitat omnis (16–27).

Columbanus develops besides the motif of the condemnation of avarice. Indeed, in his text the theme occupies noticeably more space than in Maximianus (see esp. ll. 37–56). One must admit though that his general conclusions here are much more ‘predictable’, and they are quite well epitomized by the Horatian phrase he openly quoted earlier in line 37. Maximianus’s pessimism is completely replaced by a clear conviction that “pauperibusque piis caelestia regna patescunt” (l. 56).

Another early medieval text worth mentioning in this article is by Eugenius of Toledo<sup>13</sup> (ca. 605–657), one of the most gifted Latin poets of Visigothic Spain.

<sup>12</sup> See Horace, *Epistles* I 2, 56: “*semper avarus eget; certum voto pete finem*”.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that the names of Maximianus and Eugenius were somewhat ‘correlated’, or mixed, at least at some point in the Early Middle Ages. The oldest witness to Maximianus’s lines 1–6, *aemula ... habent* is the ninth century *codex Par.* 2832 (sigled as *Man*), where Maximianus’s

*Carmen* 14<sup>14</sup> is a poem of complex structure and comprises: an introduction (elegiacs, 6 verses), *lamentatio* on old age (iambic trimeters in six five-line stanzas) and *lamentatio* on death with repentance and prayer (elegiacs, 44 verses), and, finally, five Sapphic stanzas describing an illness which befell the poet.<sup>15</sup> Similarity with Maximianus is here even fuller than in Columbanus because Eugenius's text, after the brief initial part, is also composed as a complaint, starting from an apostrophe, first to *senectus*, called *crudelis* and *improba* (see Maximianus's *aemula* ... *senectus*), then to *mors omnivorax*.

Eugenius's metaphors is very visual: the old age is shown as a merciless annihilator, devouring all that is beautiful, and compared even to a bloody stepmother killing her offspring ("mortale germen *ut noverca* saucias", l. 10).<sup>16</sup> The description of senility symptoms is not less impressive. What is more, Eugenius, whose poem may be interpreted as a kind of *abbreviatio*, in comparison with Maximianus's, is even able to be more specific in the 'epicrisis' he provides than his model was. Alongside all we have earlier learned from the late antique elegist, we hear here also of hair getting thinner, decaying teeth, and even of gout (interestingly enough, *dura tubera* refers probably to tophi, which is a very typical symptom of the gout, so our poet is, in fact, medically precise):

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piece is attributed to Eugenius and entitled *De sene*. It seems possible that Maximianus's incipit, circulating as a sort of epigram, independently from the wider context and anonymously, was attributed to Eugenius because of the latter's authority as an expert in describing old age. In fact, shortly after his death Eugenius was already considered a 'classic' in Visigothic schools and later throughout the eighth century.

<sup>14</sup>Some similarities between Eugenius's *Carm.* 14 and Maximianus have been pointed out by Ratkowitsch 1986: 14 & 30–31. Of course one should remember that Ratkowitsch's reading of Maximianus is somewhat provocative in the sense that she has proposed to postdate his poetry to the ninth century.

<sup>15</sup>P. F. Alberto (Alberto 1999: 310–311) argues for the division of Vollmer's *Carm.* 14 into two pieces, 14 and 14b; *Carm.* 14b being the above-mentioned five Sapphic stanzas on the poet's illness. Of course, he also acknowledges the fact that the 'piece' 14b is related to the precedent text, but since, in Alberto's view, it treats of an illness as an 'occasional' episode and not the old age as a human condition, it seems to be a separate unit. Alberto's arguments are worth considering, even though one should not forget that the entire 'unit' of Eugenius's poems on illness and old age is composed of more pieces: it starts with *carm.* 13, *querimonia aegritudinis propriae*, and ends only with *carm.* 15, *tetrasticha in senectam*; what is more, what follows is a cycle of five poems, variants of *epitaphion proprium*. A thorough study of all Eugenius's poems dedicated to the theme of old age and death has been provided by Kurt Smolak, see his two papers Smolak 2006 and Smolak 2010.

<sup>16</sup>I am quite convinced that the simile is a subtle allusion to Dracontius's *Medea* (*Rom.* 10), where the heroine is, indeed, named a 'stepmother', see "Quando cruentatam fecit de matre *novercam* / mixtus amore furor" (ll. 22–23). One should remember that Eugenius was a close reader of Dracontius and even a rewriter of his *Satisfactio* and *Hexaemeron* (a part of *De laudibus Dei*, book 1). Yet on the other hand it is worth remembering that the expression *ut noverca* was idiomatic in Latin and as such used already by Horace in his *Epod.* 5 in the complaint the little boy addresses to Canidia and her fellow witches: "quid ut noverca me intueris" (l. 9).



te proximante robur omne deficit,  
 salus recedit, aegritudo provenit,  
 sensus hebescent, pulcritudo deperit,  
 tabescit aegrum pectus in suspiriis,  
 gaudere taedet, eiulare conplacet.  
 tu frangis ossa, membra rugis asperas,  
 comas recidis atque canos inseris,  
 dentes retundis, muculentos efficis,  
 tremore foedo corpus omne discutis,  
 febres minaris et dolores ingeris.  
 per te podagra dura gignit tubera,  
 anhela tussis expuit putriflua,  
 cutem perurit vulnerum profusio,  
 potus cibique nulla delectatio:  
 lamenta sola conferunt solacium (12–26).

In the *lamentatio* on death we similarly find a Maximianus's phrase. "Cur properata venis?" (l. 37) echoes – although at the same time also reverses the sense of – "quid cessas finem properare?" (Max., l. 1). Death, like old age, is shown through physical traces it leaves on the body: the eyes are closed, the tongue is silent, the senses (hearing and taste) disappear, breathing ceases, the limbs stiffen, finally the whole human body turns into rotten ashes:

clauduntur oculi, garrula lingua tacet,  
 surdescunt patulae trusis anfractibus aures,  
 naribus obclusis non odor ullus adest,  
 non spirat pulmo flabris vitalibus auras,  
 frigida membra rigent nec cruor ipse calet.  
 tabe fluunt carnes, conrodunt omnia vermes,  
 sic species hominis fit putrefacta cinis (44–50).

Yet, unlike in Maximianus, in Eugenius's poem – and this is similar to what we have noticed in Columbanus – the experience of old age and death is seen from the perspective of eternity. But, whereas Columbanus offered a sort of a 'simple message': one must realize the ephemeral nature of all human affairs to discover the true value of the eternal life (and this, apparently, guarantees salvation), Eugenius reveals a profound consciousness of sin. The bishop of Toledo, indeed, dwells upon the motif of repentance. Therefore, he also closes his complaints and self-accusations with an eager prayer for God's mercy:

parce, precor, animae pulsanti, parce petenti,  
 quae flammas metuit, duro sua facta gemit.  
 gaudia tu sanctis, tu reddis praemia iustis,  
 Eugenii miseri sit rogo poena levis (77–80).

The vocabulary employed in the above-quoted passage is, of course, typical of supplications. Nonetheless, a careful reader should find here another –

and now very subtle – allusion to Maximianus, and precisely to the prayer to Mother Earth. In a discreet way, and hence the one that activates all our reading skills, Eugenius provides a ‘corrective’ to his model. Maximianus (an agnostic?) in his quasi-Chthonic prayer begged in truth only for death, for a dematerialization of his worn-out body. Eugenius, however conscious of his own sins, dares to pray for salvation. After all, it is the Heaven’s door that his soul is knocking on.

To the ninth century (most probably) is dated an anonymous poem usually cited as *Imitatio Maximiani* and offering an even better example of *abbreviatio* of Maximianus’s ‘elegy’ 1,<sup>17</sup> reduced here to forty hexameters (the measure chosen probably as an easier one than the elegiac couplets). The anonymous poet indeed imitates – and at times even appears to emulate – Maximianus, so he also, like earlier Eugenius, starts from the apostrophe to the old age. Interestingly, his *pestifero ... mucrone* (l. 4) could be somewhat compared with Eugenius’s *mortis ense* (l. 11), whereas an almost exact repetition of Maximianus is the phrase *non sum, qui dudum fueram* (l. 9); the adverb *dudum* makes it only more emphatic. Yet, unlike in his model, the phrase, rather than catalyzing further complaints, evokes fond memories of the youth. The originality of the anonymous poet is based precisely on the reversal of proportions, in comparison with Maximianus’s text. What dominates in the *Imitatio* (ll. 9–28) is not laments but descriptions of youthful pastimes (hence the theme of hunting, on which the author really elaborates), physical strength, beauty, elegance. Only afterwards does the poet provide a passage devoted to *mala senectutis*, and here one can find well-known symptoms: cough, groans, fatigue, pain, feebleness, leaning on a cane, dependence upon others. In the closure, the speaking ego begs for his life to be released from its prison, which, being an allusion to Maximianus’s initial lines (3–4), makes a nice frame with *non sum, qui dudum fueram*:

nunc tussis gemitus languor mea viscera frangunt  
et dolor ardenti succendit lampade pectus  
brachia fessa ruunt consumptis viribus aptis  
nocte dieque gravi franguntur crura dolore  
invalidus per rura trahor reptando bacillo  
nec possum recubans maeroris surgere lecto  
nam vocem ut servus nostram persenserit aure  
subducit nostris fugiens solacia membris  
nec tolerare potest longos ancilla labores  
noxia quos misit spinosa fronte senectus  
solve tenebroso miseram de carcere vitam  
turbida viventi quae nulli parcere nosti (29–40).

<sup>17</sup>Nonetheless, in lines 7–8 of the poem I see a clear allusion to Maximianus’s ‘elegy’ 5, and in particular to the hymn to *Mentula* in lines 607–672 / 87–152.

It is of course hard to establish whether the *Imitatio Maximiani* was a text of scholastic provenance, although it does seem that it could have been composed as a kind of rhetorical exercise. Nevertheless, we can certainly see it as another proof of Maximianus's popularity as a 'classic', an author who is worth reading and paraphrasing and whose knowledge is expected from one's literary audience.

It is presumably because of his being used as reading material in schools that a lyric version of his 'elegy' 1 can be found also in Middle English literature. *Le Regret de Maximian*,<sup>18</sup> a poem in Middle English, but exploiting many forms of the Old English, appears in two manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86, originally copied towards the end of the thirteenth century (here the title of *Le Regret...* is preserved), and London, British Library, Harley 2253, from the first half of the fourteenth century (where it carries the title of *Maximon*). Thus, one should not be surprised by the fact that Maximianus, or at least some of his passages, and in Latin,<sup>19</sup> were apparently well known to the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages, Geoffrey Chaucer. In the *Pardoner's Tale* we can read a delightful variation on the theme of the old man's prayer to Mother Earth. It is quite clear that Chaucer's version is not at all a translation of Maximianus's passage but, indeed, a 'variation'. Chaucer, like the late antique poet throughout his so-called 'elegy' 1, depicts the old age through its physical symptoms (flesh, blood, and skin drying up, paleness, feebleness), but he even completes his predecessor's motif with one detail: as we hear, Mother Earth rejects (or at least has not yet fulfilled) her son's plea. In other words, Chaucer's *senex*, modeled on Maximianus's, turns also into a sort of new Tithonus, forced to live forever in his exhausted body without any hope at all, neither for transcendence<sup>20</sup>, nor for dematerialization (which is the hope Maximianus's old man still seemed to have, compare his "et redit ad nihilum, quod fuit ante nihil" in line 222):

Ne deeth, allas! ne wol nat han my lyf;  
 Thus walke I, lyk a resteles caityf,  
 And on the ground, which is my modres gate,  
 I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late,  
 And seye, "leve moder, leet me in!  
 Lo, how I vanish, flesh, and blood, and skin!  
 Allas! whan shul my bones been at reste?  
 Moder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste,

<sup>18</sup>Vincent Gillespie (Gillespie 2005: 75–77) justly explains the context of the medieval English reading of Maximianus in his study on moral and penitential lyrics, [in:] Duncan 2005: 75–77. See also very interesting comments in the recent paper by Harrison 2013. As for Maximianus's presence in schools in England in the thirteenth century, see ORME 1973: 102–103. Maximianus made part of the *Sex Auctores* (which included besides Cato, Theodulus, Avianus, Claudian, and Statius).

<sup>19</sup>See Coffman 1934: 270–271. Interesting also the study he quotes by Rickert 1932.

<sup>20</sup>I find very suggestive Nitecki's interpretation of Chaucer's passage in Nitecki 1981.

That in my chambre longe tyme hath be,  
 Ye! for an heyre clout to wrappe me!”  
 But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,  
 For which ful pale and welked is my face (727–738).

Maximianus is advertized by medieval teachers and ‘theorists’ of education. A twelfth-century *Accessus Maximiani* clearly indicates the *utilitas* of his work<sup>21</sup> and, indeed, the point made here, *intentio sua est quemlibet dehortari ne stulte optando senectutis vicia desideret*, is precisely what one can easily discover reading not just Maximianus himself but also his imitators. Eberhard the German in his *Laborintus* places our poet as the fifth author among those worth being studied by the youth, right after Cato, Theodulus, Avianus, and Aesop.<sup>22</sup>

It is this Eberhard’s *Laborintus* that we can find in our Cracovian manuscript BJ 1954, provided, as I have said earlier, with a commentary and followed – now we see that the choice is neither casual nor ‘strange’ – by *Maximiani ethica de fragilitate vite*.

However, we can fully acknowledge how useful, and used (=read), Maximianus was in fifteenth-century Kraków Academy only if we take into consideration the fact that the university library possesses another codex containing the entire

<sup>21</sup> “Maximianus civis esse romanus unus ex nobilioribus ex libri auctoritate narratur, forma quoque electus ac rethorice artis ceterarumque artium diversarum peritia instructus veraciter probatur. in hoc autem libro senectutem cum suis viciis vituperat iuventutemque cum suis deliciis exaltat. est enim sua materia tarde senectutis querimonia. intentio sua est quemlibet dehortari ne stulte optando senectutis vicia desideret. *utilitas libri est cognitio stulti desiderii, senectutis evitatio*. ethice subponitur quia de moribus tractat”, in Huygens 1954: 20.

<sup>22</sup> Earlier similarly Aimeric in his *Ars lectoria*, see Manitius 1931: 181. Compare also Hugo von Trimberg’s *Registrum multorum auctorum*, especially ll. 687 ff., where Maximianus is placed right after Avianus and epitomized as follows: “Avianum sequitur hic Maximianus / qui licet in themate fuit prophanus, / tamen in dictaminis cursu non effluxit / multosque notabiles versus introduxit” (724–727). Among the *antiquiores*, Maximianus is transmitted together with Theodulus in *A*; in *S* a passage from ‘elegy’ 1 follows Avianus’s *Fabulae*, the *Disticha Catonis* can be found earlier in the codex. Among the *recentiores*, Maximianus appears together with *Disticha*, Theodulus, and Avianus in *B*, *Bd*, *Bn*, *Br*, *Ca*, *Cd*, *Li*, *M*, *P*, *R*, *Va*, *Vr*; with *Disticha* in *Ba*; with Avianus in *L*, *Mn*, *St* (but here Avianus is followed by Cicero’s *De senectute*, some treatises by Seneca, and *Somnium Scipionis*); with Theodulus in *Pra* (which, however, contains only ll 1–17; some following pages are cut off); in *T* Maximianus precedes Avianus and *Disticha*. As we can see, in manuscripts of Northern and Central European provenance, even those copied throughout the fifteenth century (like BJ 1954 & 2141), Maximianus is still interpreted as an ‘ethical’ author, like in the earlier Middle Ages. In fifteenth century humanistic Italy, however, the situation changes: Maximianus starts being transmitted not with other school texts, but rather with Roman love poets, in particular the elegists: Propertius, Ovid (the *Heroides*), Tibullus, Catullus, which eventually leads to the attribution of his work to Cornelius Gallus (by Pomponius Gauricus in his Venetian edition of *Cornelii Galli Fragmenta*, in 1502). Yet that is a different chapter in the history of reception of Maximianus’s poetry. For a systematic discussion of the problem, see especially Spinazzè 2010–2011: 61–74.

text of his *elegiae*, BJ 2141.<sup>23</sup> Its owner (or, at least, its ultimate owner) is, and probably will remain, a mystery for us, even though he did make some effort to introduce himself to his prospective readership by stating on the last page “Sum Stanislai Cracoviensis 15...”. The codex as such is a compilation of most varied authors, ancient, medieval, even early humanistic. We similarly find here Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria nova*<sup>24</sup> and this is the only piece closed with a colophon, *Gnezne 1450*.<sup>25</sup> As for Maximianus’s text, it is not only complete but also provided with a quite big commentary (mainly grammatical).<sup>26</sup> Yet its most interesting detail is in verses 227–236, i.e., again, the prayer to Mother Earth. Here is the transcription:

suscipe me genitrix nati miserere laborum  
horrendos partus cur sinis esse tuos  
nil michi cum superis explevi munera vite  
redde precor patrio mortua membra solo  
quid miseros variis prodest suspendere penis  
non est materni pectoris ista pati.  
quos quondam pulcros genuisti pectore claro  
dura nimis mater ad nihil ire iubes  
his dictis trunco titubantes sustinet artus  
neglecti repens stramina dura thori.

As we can see, lines 228–229 (*membra velis ... / horrent me pueri...*), usually included in modern editions, are missing; this, however, is an omission

<sup>23</sup> Maximianus’s text can be found on pages 439–478 (225r–245v), but it is not introduced by any *titulus* or other kind of indication (it follows immediately *Epistole Gasparini perbreves*). It may be because of this that Władysław Wisłocki in his *Catalogue of the manuscripts of the Jagiellonian Library* (Wisłocki 1877–1881) noted only its final on page 478, and not its beginning (Wisłocki’s *Catalogue* may be now consulted online, for the information referring specifically to BJ 2141, see [http://www.pbi.edu.pl/book\\_reader.php?p=54727&s=1](http://www.pbi.edu.pl/book_reader.php?p=54727&s=1) [23.02.2013]). The consequence of this omission is that the manuscript has not really been taken into consideration in studies on Maximianus’s tradition so far. Willy Schetter (Schetter 1970: 3) states clearly (and mistakenly) that the codex transmits the text from line 5,148, which is on p. 478 and which is not the case. Schetter is followed by Christina Sandquist Öberg (Sandquist Öberg 1999) and the Swedish editor, consequently, by L. Spinazzè (Spinazzè 2012).

<sup>24</sup> The *Poetria nova* is on pages 203–407 (104r–209r) and it also has a very extensive commentary, which shows how thoroughly Geoffrey’s treatise was still studied at that time in Kraków. In fact, the presence of the *Poetria nova* in both Cracovian manuscripts can be seen as an example of a well-known Central European phenomenon of lower school texts taught at university level. Many university students in Central Europe, not having much previous schooling, did have to study first very basic works, see Woods 2003: 264 [in:] Calboli Montefusco 2003.

<sup>25</sup> “Explicit liber Ganifredi scriptus Gnezne per Reverendum baccalaureum in vigilia Assumptionis b. Marie virginis sub anno nativitatis 1450”.

<sup>26</sup> The observation made above in n. 24, concerning the *Poetria nova*, can be only repeated in Maximianus’s case, whose poetry was generally recommended for younger schoolboys (compare Eberhard’s statement: “Viribus apta suis *pueris* ut lectio detur, / Auctores *tenero* fac ut ab *ore* legas”, *Lab.* 599–600). But many Cracovian students probably still needed quite intense grammatical preparation, hence the commentary.

common to several manuscripts. Much more attractive is the interpolation after the verse 234. What is remarkable about it is the fact that in this particular version it can be found only here, in BJ 2141. The line *quos quondam pulcros...* is besides transmitted in two other manuscripts, from Munich (**Mn** = München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm. 237, 1460) and Göttingen (**Lu** = Göttingen, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Lüneburg St. Michael 2, 1494 ca.) In one Viennese manuscript (**Vn** = Wien, Nationalbibliothek, MS Lat. 3114, 1481) we can read a hexametric distich: *accipe ergo natos genetrix exte generatos / quos quondam pulcros genuisti pectore claro*.<sup>27</sup> But what we have in our Cracovian BJ 2141 is a true elegiac couplet, the measure fully concordant with Maximianus's; besides, worth noting is the (correct) elision *ad nihil(um) ire* in the pentameter. The meaning of the distich is not particularly original – it seems in fact merely a variation on the motif of dematerialization developed earlier in line 222 (“et redit ad nihilum, quod fuit ante nihil”) – but its author (whoever he was, a scribe probably) did try quite hard to make it concordant with the wider context.

In ‘traditional’ textual criticism, the main goal of which is to reconstruct, or at least approach to, the ‘archetypal’ version of a text, interpolations, variants, suspicious lections usually gain little sympathy. But if we look at a text from a different perspective, the one concerning precisely its ‘reception’, they can be seen in a more favorable light, not just as unjustified intrusions into the author’s territory but as fascinating examples of an ‘active’ reading of his work; a scribe is a reader, after all. In this sense, the Cracovian manuscript BJ 2141 gives us a (one more) unique trace of a reception of Maximianus’s complaints on *senectus* in the later Middle Ages.

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**Cv** = Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, MS 2141, sec. XV

**A** = Eton, Eton College, MS 150 (Bl 6, 5), sec. XI

**B** = Città del Vaticano, Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, MS Barb. Lat. 41, sec. XIII

**Ba** = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS Lat. quart. 781, sec. XV

**Bd** = Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F. 5.6. (2195), sec. XIII

**Bn** = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Diez B Sant. 4, sec. XIV

**Br** = London, British Museum, MS Add. 21213, sec. XIII

**Ca** = Cambridge, Peterhouse, MS 215 (2.1.8), sec. XIII

**Cd** = Cambridge, Peterhouse, MS 207 (2.1.0), sec. XIII/XIV

**L** = Leiden, Bibl. Rijksuniversiteit, MS Lips. 36, sec. XIII

**Li** = Lincoln, Cathedral Chapter Library, MS 132 (C. 5.8), sec. XIII/XIV

<sup>27</sup> In **Br** (London, British Museum, MS Add. 21213, sec. XIII) we find the first verse of those transmitted in **Vn**, with only a slight change at the beginning: *accipe ge natos...*



- Man** = Paris, Bibl. Nationale, MS Lat. 2832, sec. IX  
**M** = London, British Museum, MS Reg. 15 A VII, sec. XIII  
**Mn** = München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm. 237, 1460  
**P** = Città del Vaticano, Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, MS Palat. Lat. 1537, sec. XIII  
**Pra** = Praha, Archiv Pražského Hradu (Bibl. Capit.), MS 584, sec. XV  
**R** = Città del Vaticano, Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. Lat. 2080, sec. XIII/XIV  
**S** = Città del Vaticano, Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. Lat. 1424, sec. XI  
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**Vn** = Wien, Nationalbibliothek, MS Lat. 3114, 1481  
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*QUEMLIBET DEHORTARI NE ... SENECTUTIS VICIA DESIDERET.*  
MAXIMIANUS'S ELEGY ON OLD AGE AND A FEW EXAMPLES OF  
ITS MEDIEVAL RECEPTION

### Summary

Today, Maximianus (6<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) is (too) often considered a marginal poet. Students of late Latin literature usually know and (not infrequently) admire his poetry, but he is rarely a subject of more regular lectures or seminars. It is generally found quite surprising that already among his contemporaries and later, throughout the Middle Ages, he was seen as an authority, an author worth being imitated and studied, also at schools.

Maximianus's elegiac oeuvre (since Pomponius Gauricus's 1501(/1502) edition unnecessarily divided into six separate elegies and, needless to say, for quite a long time attributed to Cornelius Gallus) is too rich in themes, too intertextual, too intergeneric to be summed up with one simple label. But it is a fact that for his medieval readers Maximianus was particularly attractive for his vivid descriptions of *mala senectutis*. Hence, it was mainly the so-called 'elegy' 1 to be read and imitated.

In the present paper I first discuss some most influential Maximianus's passages treating of the afflictions of old age and later show their interpretations and reinterpretations by Columbanus (543–615), Eugenius of Toledo († 657), and the anonymous author of the ninth century *Imitatio Maximiani*. I also point out Maximianus's presence in vernacular medieval literature, namely English. Last but not least, I demonstrate how Maximianus's image of an old man praying to Mother Earth inspired one of medieval scribes copying his text.